

MINDFULNESS, MEDITATION & RELAXATION STRATEGIES

Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention

*on purpose
in the present moment
and non-judgementally
to things as they are.*

(Kabat-Zinn, Williams, Teasdale & Segal)

How do I practice mindful meditation?

Because your breath is always with you, mindful breathing and mindful meditation is a practice that you can take with you anywhere.

A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook writes:

There are eight essential attitudes to be aware of when implementing mindful practices.

1. **Beginner's Mind:** This quality of awareness sees things are new and fresh, as if for the first time, with a sense of curiosity.
2. **Nonjudgement:** This attitude involves cultivating impartial observations in regard to any experience – not labeling thoughts, feelings, or sensations as good or bad, right or wrong, fair or unfair, but simply taking note of thoughts, feelings, or sensations in each moment.
3. **Acknowledgement:** This quality of awareness validates and acknowledges things as they are.
4. **Non-striving:** There is no grasping, aversion to change, or movement away from whatever arises in the moment; in other words, non-striving means not trying to get anywhere other than where you are.
5. **Equanimity:** This involves balance and fosters wisdom. It allows a deeper understanding of the nature of change and allows you to be with change with greater insight and compassion.
6. **Letting be:** You can simply let things be as they are, with no need to try to let go of whatever is present. Feel it. Notice it. It is okay.
7. **Self-reliance:** Helps you see for yourself, from your own experience, what is true or untrue.
8. **Self-compassion:** This quality of awareness cultivates love for yourself as you are, without self-blame or criticism.

(Stahl & Goldstein)

Your Wandering Mind

In practicing mindfulness, the mind will inevitably wander. As you start to look at the workings of your own mind, you're likely to see firsthand how often you're lost in thoughts of the future or memories of the past. For example, when showering, you may rarely just experience the shower because you're thinking of other things. Or you've probably had the experience of driving somewhere and realizing that you hardly remember how you got to your destination. There are so many times during the day where you may not be present to what's happening. In the practice of mindfulness meditation, you bring your focus to a particular object of awareness...the breath. After a short time of practicing, your mind will wander off. This is normal, especially when you are new to mindfulness. Your job is not to judge yourself, but simply bring the focus back to the breath. Rather than berating yourself, think of it this way: if you weren't mindful, you wouldn't even know you had wandered off.

Bringing your mind back to the present moment is as much a part of the practice as is concentrating on the breath. It's important to not repress or suppress thoughts and feelings as they arise in the present moment. You are learning how to be with them as they are, rather than trying to force anything a certain way. It's important to first acknowledge without judgement where your mind went, and then gently bring it back to the breath.

(Stahl & Goldstein)

Bringing the mind back after it has wandered has three main benefits.

1. It provides training in concentration. When your mind goes off and you bring it back again and again, gradually your concentration grows.
2. By coming back into the present moment and noticing where you drifted off to, you may discover that you're filled with self-judgement, worry, sadness, anger, or confusion, perhaps signaling that you need to pay closer attention to and deal with certain things in your life.
3. When you come back from wandering, you may realize you've been worrying or experiencing other distressing emotions. You may then notice that you're also experiencing physical symptoms, such as a clenched jaw or an upset stomach. By coming back into the present moment you begin to directly see and experience the mind-body connection and how your thoughts and emotions express themselves in your body. Not to mention, if you are feeling distressed and bring your attention back to your breath, you are able to calm yourself as well.

(Stahl & Goldstein)

MINDFUL PRACTICES

*Regardless of the type of practice you choose, remember, the key is the breath. Just keep bringing your attention back to your breath. Just notice the thought(s) and feeling(s) and keep returning to your breath.

**Search “guided meditation for relaxation” in YouTube. There are many videos and audio recordings for all levels and needs. Browse to see what suits you best.

Mindful Meditation Practice: I am Safe

Use this simple technique to remind your body that you are not in immediate danger

First, ask yourself, “Am I safe from immediate physical harm? - If the answer is no, then go somewhere safe. Generally, this is your FEAR talking and looking at possible or future dangers, or feelings of flashbacks.

Take in a deep, slow breath, and say to yourself, *I am safe*. You can also place your hand over your heart, which helps calm the nervous system. Remind yourself that whatever is upsetting you is not threatening your physical safety.

When you exhale, try to release any tension you feel in your body.

Breathe in – I am safe.

Breathe out – tension and fear

(Purcell & Murphy)

Mindful Meditation Practice: Big Sky Meditation

The written instructions below are a simplified version of the full guided meditation that can be downloaded at <http://www.newharbinger.com/29163>. We recommend that you listen to the audio recording to get the full benefits of this meditation.

Get started with these basic steps. Pause for about 5 seconds between each step

1. Get into a comfortable position. Shut your eyes if you like. Focus your awareness on your breath. Breathe in. Breathe out. As thoughts arise, notice them and return your attention to the breath.
2. Notice the comings and goings of sounds
3. Imagine the mind as a big blue sky. Imagine thoughts, sounds, or bodily sensations as clouds moving through the sky of the mind.
4. Imagine the breath as a gentle breeze moving clouds through the sky of the mind.
5. Let thoughts, feelings, and memories just drift through the big sky like clouds.

(Purcell & Murphy)

Mindful Meditation Practice: Loving-Kindness Meditation

The written instructions below are a simplified version of a full guided meditation that can be downloaded at <http://www.newharbinger.com/29163>. We recommend that you listen to the audio recording to get the full benefits of the meditation. Get started with these basic steps, pausing for a few minutes between steps.

You can do this practice very easily. Read these phrases again and again, slowly thinking of each word. Notice what comes up in your heart and mind. If you practice this meditation, you will begin to retrain your brain to respond differently.

May I feel safe and free from inner and outer harm.
May I let go of anger and be peaceful and at ease.
May I be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.
May I be happy and be connected to the root of happiness.
May I have courage and grace.
May I be free.

May we all feel safe and free from inner and outer harm.
May we be peaceful and at ease.
May we be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.
May we be happy and be connected to the root of happiness.
May we have courage and grace.
May we be free.

(Purcell & Murphy)

Mindful Walking

As you walk, you'll notice that you don't need to think much about what your legs and body do while walking. They seem to go on autopilot. As you begin this activity, focus on your breathing – deeply in and out. Focus on the rhythm of your steps and how your body feels as it moves. If your mind wanders to other things, just notice that. Then, gently bring your attention back to the experience of walking. Notice the feel of your feet as they meet the ground with each step. Move your awareness to your hip area – experience how your hips move with each stride. What sensations are there? Then, move further up to your midsection, and allow yourself to feel all the movements there too. See how your body is in perfect rhythm and flow. Notice how you're moving with your thoughts and feelings too – all of them going forward. Sense the vitality in this movement. Reflect on this mantra to yourself: *My life is moving with my experiences.*

(Forsyth & Eifert)

Soften, Soothe, and Allow

Guided meditation available at: <http://self-compassion.org/soften,soothe,allow.MP3>

Please find a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take three deep, relaxing breaths. Perhaps place your hand on your heart for a few moments to remind yourself that you are in the room, and to bring kindness to yourself.

Bring awareness to your body and the sensations occurring there in the present moment. Then, find your breath in the heart region and begin to track each breath with awareness.

Now, let yourself recall a mild to moderately difficult situation that you are in right now. Perhaps stress in a relationship. Do not choose a very difficult, traumatic problem or something really trivial, rather choose a problem that can generate a little stress in your body when you think of it. Now, clearly visualize the situation. Who was there? What was said? What happened?

Labelling – Now, see if you can name the strongest emotion – a difficult, uncomfortable emotion – associated with the situation (anger, grief, sadness, confusion, fear). Repeat the name of the emotion to yourself in a gentle and understanding voice, as if you were validating for a friend what he or she is feeling. “That is grief,” “That is anger.”

Mindfulness of emotion in the body – Now, try to locate the difficult emotion in your body. Where is it centered? In your head, your throat, your heart? What is the sensation like? Is it hard, tingling, cold, pulsating? Sometimes all you feel is numbness – you can bring attention to this sensation as well.

Soften, soothe, allow: Soften into that location in your body. Let the muscles be soft without a requirement that they become soft, like simply applying heat to a sore muscle. You can say, “soft, soft, soft” to yourself to enhance the process. Remember that you are not trying to make the sensations go away, you are just being with them with loving awareness.

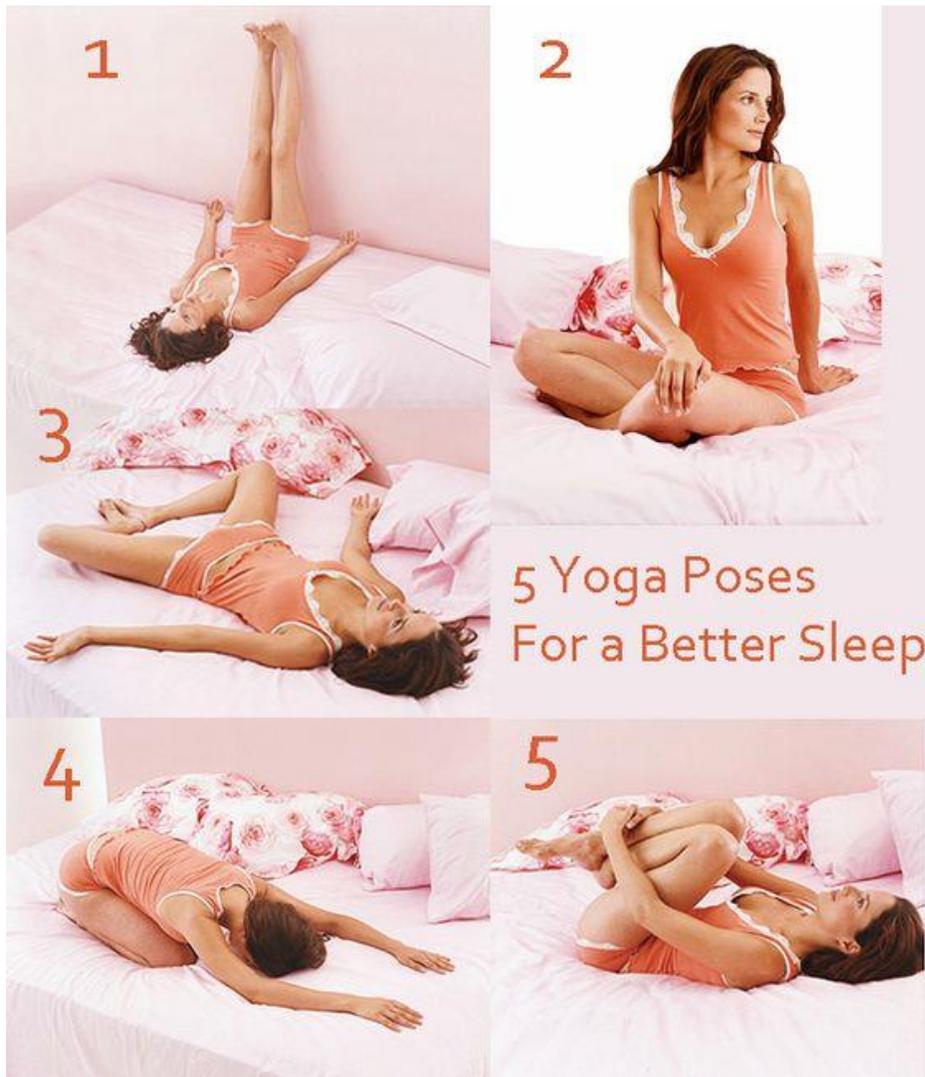
Now, soothe yourself for struggling in this way. Put your hand over your heart and feel your body breathe. Perhaps kind words arise in our mind, such as, “This is such a painful experience. May I grow in ease and well-being.”

If you wish, you can also direct kindness to the part of your body that is under stress by placing your hand in that place. It may help to think of your body as if it were the body of a beloved child. You can say kind words to yourself, or just repeat, “soothe, soothe, soothe.” Allow the discomfort to be there. Abandon the wish for the feeling to disappear. Let the discomfort come and go as it pleases. You can repeat, “allow, allow, allow.”

“Soften, soothe, allow,” “Soften, soothe, allow,” “Soften, soothe, allow.” You can repeat these words as a mantra, reminding yourself to incline with tenderness towards suffering. If you experience too much discomfort with an emotion, stay with your breath until you feel calmer.

(Neff)

Yoga and Stretches for Mindful Relaxation



(Fitness Magazine)

Beginners Yoga for Relaxation & Sleep:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJeSbfl-CzY>

Goodbye Stress: Calming Stretching Workout – 13 mins.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxsQr7YOq7o>

Yoga for Relaxation – 20 min. beginners home stretch routine

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKwhobK_zzQ

Omved[®] yoga poses to
15 induce sleep

- 1 **tadasana**
PALM TREE POSE 
- 2 **uttanasana**
FORWARD FOLD POSE 
- 3 **utkatasana**
CHAIR POSE 
- 4 **adho mukha svanasana**
DOWNWARD FACING DOG POSE 
- 5 **marjaryasana & bitilasana**
CAT & COW POSE 
- 6 **salamba bhujangasana**
SPHINX POSE 
- 7 **balasana**
CHILD POSE 
- 8 **paschimottonasana**
SEATED FORWARD BEND 
- 9 **viparita karani**
LEGS-UP-THE-WALL POSE 
- 10 **ananda balasana**
HAPPY BABY POSE 
- 11 **urdhva dhanurasana**
BRIDGE POSE 
- 12 **supta matsyendrasana**
SUPINE SPINAL TWIST 
- 13 **badhakonasana**
RECLINED BUTTERFLY POSE 
- 14 **pavanuktasana**
WIND RELEASE POSE 
- 15 **savasana**
CORPSE POSE 

Mindful Meditation audio clips:

Guided Relaxation – Yoga Nidra with Jennifer Reis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pflkxpis9s>

10 minutes: Tara Healy

<http://www.harvardpilgrim.org/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/MEMBERS/WELLNESS/MINDFULNESS/MINDFULNESSMP3/HPHC-GUIDED-MEDITATION-10-MINUTES.MP3>

15 minutes: Lois Howland

<http://health.ucsd.edu/specialties/mindfulness/Documents/Audio/Awareness-of-Breath.mp3>

Body Scan: 10 and 20 minute guided audio clips by Tara Healy on her “Mind the Moment” website

http://www.harvardpilgrim.org/portal/page?_pageid=213,293349&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

Guided audio for 20-40 minutes online at:

www.designmindful.com/mbct

Harvard Pilgrim Healthcare text and guided audio by Tara Healy

http://www.harvardpilgrim.org/portal/page?_pageid=213293349&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

University of San Diego guided by Steve Hickman, Lois Howland and others:

<http://health.ucsd.edu/specialties/mindfulness/mbsr/Pages/audio.aspx>

University of Missouri guided audio:

http://www.umsystem.edu/curators/wellness/wellness_video

Mindful Online resources:

mindful.org – website and has a print magazine you can subscribe to

headspace.com – tools for learning and practicing

dharmaseed.org – large collection of talks by secular and spiritual teachers of mindfulness

chopra.com – The Chopra Centre

MBCT handouts and free audio downloads:

http://www.gilford.com/MBCT_materials

www.mbct.com (about mindfulness-based cognitive therapy)

Mindful Eating & General Mindfulness:

<http://tcme.org/principles.html>

<http://mindful.org>

http://bemindful.co.uk/about_mindfulness

Self-Compassion:

<http://mindfulnesscompassion.org>

<http://selfcompassion.org>

Mindfulness and Healing Trauma:

An excellent talk by Tara Brach, PhD

<http://dharmafeed.org/teacher/175/talk/8546/>

Mindfulness and Anger Management:

<http://mindfulnessangermanagement.com>

Free mindfulness apps worth trying:

1. Stop, Breathe, Think

Available for iPhone and Android

This app offers a solid sampling of the basics of meditation, featuring a range of exercises at varying lengths (mindfulness meditation, loving-kindness meditation, the body scan practice), ideal for short practices at work and longer sessions at home. The non-profit Tools for Peace originally created the app for students and staff in their kindness and compassion programs, but the app's popularity in the apple store has taken SBT to a more mainstream crowd.

Mindfulness apps are notorious for having a questionable “emotional check-in” component where you're asked to input your emotions—then the app spits out some kind of progress report based on whether you've clicked enough smiley faces that week or month. But this app harnesses that emotional component much more effectively by asking you to input how you feel, mentally and physically comprehensively, and then suggests a variety of meditation practices based on your response.

The look and feel of the app is very accessible, with plain-English explanations of what meditation is and how to do it, and with a bit of humor weaved into the whole project—SBT recently posted a video to Twitter entitled “Here's k.d. Lang using the Stop, Breathe & Think app.” The pop and country superstar—who has been promoting the app alongside Tools for Peace—is featured, and the video consists of her sitting infinitely still for a whole minute. When you're browsing the app, the practices don't feel like homework so much as a nice foray into something a little different.

Unexpected surprise: for a small fee, you can download a pack of meditations narrated by k.d. Lang.

2. Calm

Available for iPhone and Android

Calm evolved out of Calm.com, a free web app where users could select background scenery and sounds (sunny seaside with crashing waves is one selection), set a timer, and chill out for a few minutes. Now, in app form, Calm consists of a “7 Steps to Calm” guide as well as its seaside offerings.

The “7 Steps to Calm” was a bit too long, and instructions were vague at times. For instance, the step about posture veers into an impromptu discussion on how “we’re so busy doing that we forget about being” that you’re not really learning about posture anymore. If you listen to all 7 steps at once, repetitious language became annoying (The phrase “Feel the tension melt away” came up more than once). Calm is not ideal for learning meditation, but it is good for catching a few blissful moments to do absolutely nothing.

One major logistical pet peeve: the app lets you access the 7 steps and one calm practice, but shows you a long list of other practices you have to purchase to unlock. There were more locked practices available than unlocked.

3. Mindfulness Training App

Available on iPhone

Created by Sounds True, a major publisher of meditation books, audio and other media, this app gives you a taste of teachings from key mindfulness instructors, including Jon Kabat-Zinn, the pioneer of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Jack Kornfield, Tara Brach, and others. If you’re new to meditation, this app is a great opportunity to get a more intimate understanding of what it’s all about. Seasoned practitioners might be drawn to the extra talks available on the app concerning the science of mindfulness, varying definitions surrounding the practice, neuroplasticity, and happiness.

One small issue: app navigation is a bit clunky. You have to play the first practice before you can navigate to a screen that shows you the six meditation practices you can select from.